



* The Tunnel of the 50-Year-Old Female Actor

A f***ing tunnel in which roles become scarce

Today, one adult French woman in two is over 50. Nonetheless, this evident majority in daily life becomes invisible in fictional works in both film and television. Despite the fact that, year after year, demographic studies confirm the growing importance of women in French society, the presence of older women in fiction has not evolved. Female characters have not grown older. They have simply disappeared from the screen.

Female actors constitute a majority of the actors in the 20 to 35 year old range. Then, at around 50, male actors outnumber them. Female actors seem to disappear after turning forty and then pop up again, but sparingly, at 65 in the roles of grandmothers. Anne Le Ny, a French actor who is also a director and script writer, commented in *Télérama*, "At 50, women in the profession develop a supernatural power: they become invisible – especially on the screen!" Thus, in the prime of her life, the 50-year-old female French actor confronts a gaping void in her professional life. As the saying goes, "There is nothing between Juliet and the Nurse".

Women over 50 represent exactly 51% of the French adult female population. We calculated the percentage of roles for women in this range in French films released in 2015: The result was 8%. In 2016, it's worse : 6%!

51% of women in France are over 50... yet only 6% of the feminine roles were attributed to this age category! A major part of our real life population is practically non-existent on screen.

The Barbara Dean report "Age, Gender and Performer Employment in Europe" (International Federation of Actors, 2007) underscores to what extent our professional reality as actresses -- why, when and how we find work -- represents much more than our experience as workers. Our professional reality is in effect the reflection of an image of women based on stereotypes, prejudice or ignorance. It mirrors what women generally are confronted with in our society: the same glass ceiling, the same social and wage inequalities.

We know that the subject is not new. It has been known but accepted as inevitable, deliberately passed over in silence. Because speaking about it would mean giving importance to this injustice. And then, the best way to maintain an injustice, whatever the domain may be, is by imposing the law of silence! We know that.

All the same, a link exists between what cinema and TV fictional works show us and the way we conceive social reality. Because more than just being artistic objects, fictional works, by what they convey, are vectors of norms and values. They thus participate in the construction of a collective unconscious appropriate to each society. If the 50-year-old woman is not shown, she doesn't exist! And our collective unconscious fills the void with images from another century.

Our society needs fictional works that confront us with the 50-year-old woman as she is today. Fictions that say: Here she is! This is what she looks like! This is the face she has, this is the body she has, and this is what her life is like -the woman who is neither young nor old- these are her dreams, her shadows, her fears, this is her boldness! So here she is... In all her human complexity!

And our mission as artists is also to give our society, and in particular our young people, examples of 50-year-old women with whom they can identify in order to build together the world of tomorrow.

This is also why Marina Tomé created the AAFA commission we call "The Professional Tunnel of the 50-year-old Actress". It questions this particular period of our lives, exploring this phenomenon of invisibility. What causes this? Why does it continue when society has evolved? How can we change the situation? Why is it necessary and even essential to do so? What actions must be taken?

We are a group of about 50 women and men who have decided to speak out and change things!

Our objectives:

- **To end the law of silence.** To put the spotlight on sexist stereotypes linked to age that are reproduced in an unconscious manner in fictional works. Our aim is to make visible what remains invisible and to change in a positive way the representation of women over fifty.
- **To make all our professional partners aware** of this subject, from production companies to directors, and also agencies, casting directors, screenwriters, television network decision makers etc.
- **To make concrete proposals** in order to work together to change the perception of sex and age. To end the representation of an artificial, fantasized world composed only of young and pretty people. To give to women of 50 and older their place in film and TV fictional works, the place they in fact occupy in society. The place that is rightfully theirs!

Launched in December 2015, the AAFA Commission "The Professional Tunnel of the 50 year old Actress" announced its initial objective for 2016: end the law of silence by bringing attention to the invisibility of 50 year old women in fictional works, stating the problem and understanding the causes and consequences. This we have already achieved!

The actions we've undertaken:

- **The endorsement** of our commission by the Ministry for Family, Children and Women's Rights within the framework of its campaign "**#SexismePasNotreGenre: A Campaign Against Sexism in France**" and the awarding of a prize by internet users as the best endorsed initiative.
<http://www.egalite-femmes-hommes.gouv.fr/les-femmes-de-50-ans-ne-veulent-plus-etre-invisibles/http://www.familles-ence-fance-droitsdesfemmes.gouv.fr/initiative/tunnel-des-50/>
- **The creation of video clips** realized to raise awareness on that matter that were widely shared on the social networks
video clip 2018
video clip 2017
video clip 2016
- **The organization of an important conference** in January 2017 on "*The strange and fabulous destiny of the 50 year old feminine character*" at the Cinéma des Cinéastes in Paris, drawing together an important number of our professional partners as well as members of the press.
<http://aafa-asso.info/captation-et-retranscription-de-la-table-ronde-aafa-tunnel-de-la-comedienne-de-50-ans/>
- **The launching of a vast nationwide medico-sociological study** regarding female and male actors (and in particular actresses over 50) in collaboration with the CMB (a health centre dedicated to our profession) as well as sociologists and statisticians.
- **The launching of a dialogue with our partners** involved in fictional works (screenwriters, directors, casting agents, producers...) in order to explore together new paths of action at the very heart of our different professions.
- **The launching of the [AAFA-Tunnel des 50 Manifesto](#)** that federates a vast number of signatories among both professionals and the general public.
On the 12th of December 2018, at the Cinéma des Cinéastes in Paris, all **the diverse unions, guilds and professional organizations that are implicated in the work we do came together** for the official signing of the Manifesto. We are delighted because it's by working together that we can make things change.
<https://aafa-asso.info/le-manifeste-aafa-tunnel-des-50-federe-les-professionnels/>

What the press says:

<http://aafa-asso.info/revue-de-presse-aafa-tunnel-de-la-comedienne-de-50-ans/>

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<http://aafa-asso.info/tunnel-de-la-comedienne-de-50-ans/>